

DEATHNOTES:

THE **BRIEF** HISTORY OF THE **DEAD** BY KEVIN BROCKMEIER



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1. Key Facts

Title: *The Brief History of the Dead*

Author: Kevin Brockmeier

Genre: Mystery

Date of Publication: 2006

Publisher: Random House Inc.

Narrator: Third Person voice, no particular character

Point of view: Third Person

Tone: Gloomy & depressed

Setting (Time): Middle of 21st Century

Setting(s) (Place): The City & Antarctica

Protagonist: Laura Byrd

Major Conflict: Laura Byrd is the last remaining human being on earth. She is trapped in the harsh environment of Antarctica and must survive in order for the souls of the deceased to continue living

Rising Action: A massive epidemic referred to as “The Blinks,” wipes out the entire human population with the exception of Laura Byrd

Climax: Michael Puckett and his friend Robert Joyce realize that since Laura is the only survivor from the epidemic, she must live in order for the souls of the dead and the City to live and thrive.

Falling Action: Spring arrives and Laura plus the souls that live in the City see a change in direction in their lives as they begin to find new reasons to live, their lives become much happier

Foreshadowing: The fact that Laura was the only character that wasn't in the City showed a clear distinction between the dead and the living, most of the deceased actually talked about the ways they died while Laura was the only one who never mentioned anything about the way she died. In addition, when Laura finds graves in front of the Arctic station, the book foreshadows the idea that she is somewhat separate from everyone else.

2. Character List

1.Laura Byrd

Laura Byrd is the main character in the story, who takes the readers on a journey through Antarctica, where she tries to find out her true identity and to uncover hidden questions about her life. Throughout the story, she is trapped in the lonely, cold, dark Antarctica, where she is completely isolated from the real world. She is depicted as a strong-willed, confident, and independent woman, which helps her as a character to overcome the hardships and obstacles she faces. Her appearance and personality are tomboy-like and she is in her late 20's.

2.Luka Sims

Luka Sims illustrates what happens inside The City. He takes on the role of a newspaper journalist in the City and acts as a messenger to inform people about what happens in both worlds. His personality is more closed in than Laura and is always observing what's going on. He has the similar age as Laura and is described as a professional, polished, intellectual person.

3.Minny Rings

Minny is a minor character that travels with Luka Sims during their time in the City. One of the significant events that occurs with Minny is when Minny and Luka are lost and alone in a isolated part of the City. During this time, they find out how they have something in common; that is, they both know Laura somehow or another. Minny is portrayed as a younger girl, about the age of a teenager, and is extremely curious about the situation she is in. She is constantly asking questions and enjoying the adventures she is in.

4.Coleman Kinzler

Coleman is a character that symbolizes Christianity and is a unique character that holds a strong belief in it. Kinzler travels through the City to persuade people about God; however, most people are ignorant and careless about the religion, so he is easily looked down upon in the story. Coleman is described as a lonely, homeless, nomad, constantly finding a better condition to live in and to spread word about his determined beliefs in God. The beggar that he is does not stop him from pursuing his beliefs and to fight on the strenuous battle of discovering what the afterlife is truly like.

5.Phillip & Marion Byrd

These two characters the parents of Laura and are the only two characters that bring a new side to the story. As they also live in the City, like most of the other characters, their love for each other goes stronger than ever and they realize how insensitive and thoughtless they were during the time when they were actually living. In the beginning of the story, Laura describes her parents as irresponsible and indifferent to Laura's life. They demonstrate the typical husband and wife in the society that only care about themselves, and that have no true love for their family. Both couples are in their mid-40's when they enter the City, and they are always portrayed as always very dark and filled with anger in their faces.

7. Michael Puckett and Robert Joyce

Puckett and Joyce are associates of Laura at the Coca-Cola Company, and they are lost in Antarctica with Laura. They were initially planning to go to Antarctica to research the water conditions and to experiment the waters to see if it was possible to make an eco-friendly product for consumers. However, after a couple days into their journey, they suddenly disappear into nowhere and Laura is left behind. They are also minor characters who accompany Laura through the journey and influence her to continue the journey because of their absence. They can be described as young and adventurous, and very innocent at the same time. Just like Laura, they have recently found a job at the Coca-Cola Company, so they look almost like college students.

8. Blind Man

The blind man is abstract in a sense that he is involved in most scenes of the book and he is intertwined in most of the characters' lives. He is also described as a beggar, wearing rugged clothes and having uncombed, shabby hair. He is one of the characters living in the City, and he entered there because he got hit in a car accident. Although he cannot see, he is sensible and attentive, and is always on alert on what is going on around the City.

3. Major Character Analysis

1.Laura Byrd

Laura Byrd is a specialist, who was recently hired by the Coca-Cola Company. The Coca-Cola company wanted a group of researchers who could go to Antarctica and discover new products and get data about the type of water that was produced there. With couple other people, such as Michael Puckett and Robert Joyce, Laura ventures to Antarctica. However, things go out of hand, and she starts to lose the group of people she traveled with. Around the middle of the story, Laura is completely stranded in Antarctica by herself and she needs to survive on her own. She journeys on and on, however, she does not come to an end. During this time she is alone, she goes through numerous hardships and obstacles such as having to find her own food, having to overcome her loneliness and desperateness, and to endure the coldness of Antarctica. Since Laura has a strong personality of being independent and self-willed, she is able to figure most of these things out on her own.

The book emphasizes her independence throughout the novel, and it implies how the environment has shaped her character tremendously. For example, when she was little, because her parents were very careless of Laura, she had to grow up all on her own. This type of treatment she had from her parents molded her to become the woman she is seen in the novel. At the same time, Laura is still trying to figure out the mysteries that she is going through during the Antarctica journey. She does not understand why she is in the situation and what she needs to do to survive. Being the main character, she is in the end, the center of almost everyone's lives in the City, which also shows how important people are individually to a society. By using Laura as an example, Kevin Brockmeier emphasizes the importance of communication and interaction between human beings. He illustrates how dangerous and lonely the world can get without having relationships and connections with one another.

2.Coleman Kinzler

Coleman Kinzler is a significant character in this story because he introduces the way that people react to religion in our world and how effective or ineffective it can be to believe in a religion. As a homeless, street person, Kinzler goes around the ghostly world of the City to find people that he can persuade to believe in Christianity. "The people were created in the image of God, and thus they were within the precinct of His grace, even the ones who did not know Him, the ones who withdrew themselves from His presence." This quote is what Coleman preached to the people in the City, drawing attention to how God is the main creator of everything living on this world and that by believing in him, people will not have to struggle with having to live a regretful life in the City (Brockmeier 104). Although Coleman tries extremely hard, no one in the City nor the people from the outside world give efforts to listen or understand the religion. However, in the end, when Coleman dies again from the City to truly enter the next afterlife, he is taken to a beautiful place where no one could imagine, which most readers interpret as heaven, and those who did not listen to him and were resistant of religion were nonetheless stuck in the City without knowing their guilts and faults.

3.Blind Man

The blind man is like Nick Carraway from *Great Gatsby*, where he plays the role of noticing everything that happens in the novel and he is the ultimate character that opens and closes the story. In some ways, he could even be symbolized as Jesus, where he looks and observes the characters in the story rather than actually interacting with them. Although he is a person living in the City, he plays a significantly different role than the other normal characters. He is connected to the characters in the story somehow and he seems to know everything about them. Although the book does not tell us when or how the City was established, it is possible that the Blind Man was the creator or founder of the City and because he opened up the new world, all of the people that were related to him started to enter the City. He is very wise and keen, and acts as a grandfatherly role to the new members of the City. Even when Laura enters the City, he is sincere and welcoming of her entrance.

4. Important Quotations

1. *"This restlessness of hers, the way her mind kept turning over on itself as she lay in bed--it was kind of like the city, wasn't it? The entire population was suffering from an excess of consciousness, an excess of life."*

This quote is significant in the fact that it was the first time Laura was realizing the existence of the City and how it connected to her life. Although Laura isn't completely in the City, she is slowly starting to see what the City is and believe that there is such a place. Also, the fact that she notices similarities between the City and the real world brings up the question that she has possibly been in the City before, just that she does not remember. This quote emphasizes the theme of confusion and restlessness and how Laura is at a climax part of the story, where she is starting to put bits and pieces of the mysteries and secrets she's been trying to uncover the whole time during her adventure through Antarctica. As the last line states that the entire population was suffering from excess consciousness and life, this seems to show how people in the real world are too caught up in the life they're living, that they don't realize how happy and appreciative they should be. The fact that people are suffering from too much life portrays people's greed and selfishness to have everything they want in the time span of their life on Earth and how they can regret when they die or when they enter the afterlife.

2. *"The first two days of the journey went by without trouble. From her seat in the hedge, Laura followed a steady course to the northwest, using the GPS system. She drove through the long daybreak of the Antarctic fall, resting only when the sun was high enough to rise up off the ice in a disorienting glare."*

This quote shows Laura's noticeable independence throughout the journey. This scene takes place mid way through her journey, where she starts to run out of basic needs to survive and she doesn't know where to go and how further she needs to travel. Although she is stuck and she doesn't have anyone near her to help her, this quote depicts Laura's self-determination and self-sufficiency to do whatever it takes to survive. She has a strong sense of perseverance and goal to survive, that without knowing what gender she was, readers could not have guessed that she was a woman. The quote demonstrates Laura's personality and provides the readers to truly connect with Laura and how she is suffering on her own.

3. *"At first Laura had mistaken them for natural formations, like the terraced ridges that sometimes appear on beaches or deserts when the wind blows just swiftly enough to carve its own patterns in the sand and just slowly enough not to disturb them."*

Throughout the book, it is evident that Brockmeier included numerous references to nature and the environment in the Earth. The fact that he mentioned Antarctica is quite out of the blue, but actually reading the book explains why he chose Antarctica to lay the story. Since the afterlife is such an abstract place and a place that no one knows for sure how it looks like, by incorporating nature scenes and nature alliterations, readers are able to grasp an even stronger

feel for what Brockmeier imagines the world of the dead would be like. This quote is filled with nature descriptions and it gives a good imagery and sense of what Laura is feeling through her journeys in Antarctica.

4. *"She was nobody special. When she died, there would be no one to remember her. The simple truth was that her strength--or whatever combination of muscle, luck, and willpower had driven her from the hut to the shelter and from the shelter onto the open ice and across the bay."*

Near the end of Laura's journey through Antarctica, Laura is at the moment where she is about to give up on everything she's done because of her depression and lack of motivation to push further on. This quote stresses Laura's loss of identity and exhaustion, which also coincides with the theme that is portrayed in this section of the book. As Laura looks back on what she's done throughout her life, she is starting to feel excluded from the society and expresses that she is nothing "special." She starts to lose the confidence she has in herself by thinking that she isn't worth living in the world anymore and that she is not going to be remembered by anyone. This is a strong quote that expresses the feelings that Laura is going through and Brockmeier does a good job of using impacting words to convey Laura's lack of motivation and hope near the end of her journey.

5. *"She picked herself up and brushed the snow from her body, collecting her crystals in her palms and pouring them into the fountain over the thousands of silver coins, which shimmered in the light of the atrium."*

Usually, crystals are depicted as things that are shiny and sparkly, and something that radiates light. Combining the meaning of this quote and the interpretation I have of crystals, the quote seems to show a sense of hope and glory. This whole chapter talked about the idea of rebirth and how beautiful a rebirth of a creation could be. By using crystals as a metaphor, it illustrates the picture of a doorway opening up to the heavens and a birth of a new life. Having this bright and vibrant description halfway through the book certainly brings optimism and aspiration to the readers. Before, the chapters were extremely depressing and filled with hate, anger, and depression. However, as the story approaches this chapter, a new perspective is shown and readers are opened to a fresh new interpretation of the afterlife and how they could imagine the idea of rebirth.

5. Themes and Symbols

Themes

1. Death does not end your presence on earth.

As soon as one dies during their lifetime, they go to the after life called 'The City'. The people who are in the city live there based on the memories of the people who are alive on planet Earth. In other words, the characters in The City stay based on the memories of people they impacted while they were alive such as their family and friends. The way that Kevin Brockmeier incorporated this message made it apparent that death did not end each characters' presence on earth. Luka, Minny, and the blind man talk about their old lives in each chapter, and Brockmeier inputs many different characters that the main characters meet during their lifetime. Brockmeier put these characters to emphasize that Luka, Minny, and the blind man touched many different lives and that they will live in The City based on the people they met and left memories with. Even though all of these characters died from sudden attacks, the people remained on Earth remembered them somewhere in their hearts.

The reason for being in the City was a mystery for many. Some came up with irrelevant theories, but many were believing that they were located in the City due to their memories left in the real life. "If the only life they had was bestowed upon them by the memories of the living, as Russell was inclined to believe, what would happen when the rest of the living were gathered into the city?" was mentioned on chapter 1, when Russel was concerned about their presence in Earth and he was questioning the theory (Brockmeier, 14). In the chapters towards the end, people were sure they were in the city based on the memories they left. "It was true that most of the city's occupants went away after sixty or seventy years, and while this did not prove the theory, it certainly served to nourish it," Brockmeier stated about the strange City (Brockmeier, 15). People came and went based on the memories of many, but since memories are left within one generation, the people in the city seemed to disappear in a 60 year span. This proves the theory of the people having their presence left on earth, even after death, whether it is through their friends or their beloved families.

2. Loneliness is a deathly feeling.

Loneliness is a terrible feeling, a feeling that is the cause of many deaths around the world. Brockmeier inputs the feeling of loneliness in various characters and in various characters. Most of the deaths that the characters in the City experienced was resulted through loneliness. Laura Byrd, a character that is stuck in a lab in Antarctica and loses her mates and describes a feeling that she's never felt before. "One night, shortly after she had eaten dinner, when she could have sworn there wasn't a thought in her head, she became terribly sad. She felt it as a sort of aching in her joints, as though her body were suddenly collapsing in on itself. What was this? she wondered. The feeling seemed to rise up from out of nowhere," Laura feels (Brockmeier, 17). The portrayal of loneliness seems deathly through the words of Brockmeier and Laura expresses loneliness as a feeling that she would never want to withstand again.

The cause of loneliness is not only described by being alone in a certain place like Laura had been in Antarctica, but Brockmeier also uses the example of loneliness through being unloved. The blind man had been blind his whole life and the kids used to make fun of him when he was alive. This feeling of loneliness had been with him for an extremely long period of time since he couldn't receive love. Brockmeier states, "One day, not long after the last of his neighborhood's restaurants had closed its doors, the blind man was standing on the steps of the church, waiting for someone who would listen to his story. No one had passed him all day long, and he was beginning to wonder if the end had come once and for all," as he emphasizes his theme (Brockmeier, 35). Since the virus had been spreading for a long period of time, the blind man was not able to receive love anymore from his friends in the city, which resulted him to become lonely. This feeling is expressed through dark weather patterns that the characters go through.

Symbols

1.The Virus (The Epidemic)

The virus is the cause of the massive death in the real world and the people in the city are decreasing because of this matter. Many people that recently came into the city were questioned whether or not they were dead from that cause. "The virus became airborne and waterborne. Two billion died in Asian and Eastern Europe," states Brockmeier about the cautions (Brockmeier, 14). The virus is described as airborne and waterborne in this passage which symbolizes hatred in our society today. Through out the book, there is a lot of hatred tension between the characters and just like the virus, hatred can spread through out a large space. Hate causes terrible things in our world such as murder, terror attacks, heart breaks, and other cruel events. Brockmeier purposely uses the virus to symbolize the negative things that are spreading in our world today in a fast pace.

Another aspect that plays part in the virus is the technology we use today. Brockmeier purposely makes the virus sound more dramatic than it really is and this relates to the use of our technology today. Through the use of internet, people are putting negative comments that hurts others, which often leads to suicide or hatred. Also, the technology we use in our world today makes us extremely lazy since it does everything for us. More and more people are becoming obese and the amount of heart attacks each year are increasing. "He had been writing fewer stories about the city recently and more about the world of the living, stories he assembled from interviews with the recent dead, most of whom were victims of what they called the epidemic," states Brockmeier about the virus (Brockmeier, 13). The amount of the dead and the cause is emphasized in this passage and Brockmeier. Brockmeier purposely leaves the audience wonder what the true cause of the deaths are such as the technology we use today. People are caught up in major obsessions such as technology which can spread through out the world and cause harm.

2.The City

The city is the place where people go in the after life. However, Brockmeier put the city as a symbol for second chances. The people in the city are people who steadily realize certain

things about their lives in the future. These things that the people in the city realize in the after life were not known in the real life, so Brockmeier stresses that people realize certain aspects in life through second chances. "There were more people in the city every day, and yet the city never failed to accommodate them," stated chapter 1 (Brockmeier, 6). The passage above mentions the increasing people in the city, which also expresses the people who need second chances are increasing as well. Luka realizes that his life was not as bad as he thought it was in the ending chapters and he thinks that the city played a big part in this matter. Once again, the author emphasized the need for more time for realizing what one had before they lost it.

The city also plays a symbol for global warming as well. The world is becoming hotter each year due to the increase of carbon emissions, and people are dying from extreme weather or storms. In the book, Brockmeier makes the city change rapidly and many people start disappearing. This is just like global warming, when the world population is decreasing from weather patterns that are irregular or storms like Hurrican Katrina that hit hard and take away many lives. "Unquestionably, the city was changing. People who had perished in the epidemic came and went very quickly, sometimes in a matter of hours, like a mid-spring snow that blankets the ground at night and melts away as soon as the sun comes up," states Brockmeier on about the city changing (Brockmeier, 15). The author, in this passage, talks about the changes in weather within the city several times which once again contributes to the idea that the city symbolizes global warming in our world today. The weather in our world today is highly unpredictable, as well as the city in the book where no one can predict the future.

6. Summaries

Chapter One - The City

The first chapter begins by introducing the concept of ‘crossing over,’ and how it occurs. After people die, their souls continue to exist in a place called ‘The City.’ It is said that the only reason people’s souls continue to thrive in the cities is because people that are still alive have memories of the deceased. Once the people still living forget about the deceased, the deceased seem to disappear. The deceased are also able to remember how they died, whether it be through old age or a car accident. Many souls, right before entering the City, mistake it for heaven but realize that it isn’t heaven by noticing the noisy garbage trucks and dirty sidewalks. The City was almost like a normal life in the city, with almost nothing changing at all. However, this time something was different. Luka Sims, a soul and newspaper editor for Sims News, is writing an article about the grand epidemic that wiped out the entire human population. However Luka begins to notice something bizarre. As the souls of the dead continue to thrive in the City, less and less souls seem to be in the City. The chapter describes this mysterious disappearance of souls as a flood that has been set free by an open gate into a mysterious land. In addition, Luka noticed that the souls of the people who were killed by the epidemic seemed to only remain in the City for a very short time. The soul of a random old man who lives his afterlife cleaning up a church looks towards telling another soul of his life before he died, however he fails to anybody to talk to due to the decreasing number of souls in the City. It is revealed that a deceased virologist by the name of Ethan Hass had been studying the possibility of a growing epidemic for 13 years before his death, reaching conclusions about how it would affect the human race. In the end, somebody succeeds in manufacturing this virus which is the cause of the massive absence of people in the world.

Chapter Two - The Shelter

A woman named Laura Byrd finds herself trapped in a small camp in Antarctica. She recalls being with her companions and fellow employees Puckett and Joyce before waking up all alone in the camp. She remembers the antenna of the satellite dish breaking down due to the extreme temperatures. She discovers that the ice had formed along with the satellite, and together with the harsh winds, broke the satellite dish off its base. Laura now finds herself trapped without any means of communication with the outside world. Laura is in Antarctica after she agreed to go on the trip which was sponsored by the Coca-Cola company. She recalls the Coca-Cola company sent employees there in order to discover new, convincing ways of using the ice to produce fresh water and later, coke. Only Laura was there as a wildlife specialist, to study the penguins and other polar organisms. However due to the scarcity of wildlife there, she finds the idea of being there to be quite pointless as well as ironic. She remains in the small camp for a few days, feeding off the remaining instant food that is there. She survives day after day, pondering what to do. She eventually begins to feel extremely preoccupied and begins to show signs of desperation as she blurts out random sequences of words, starts crying and screaming. Eventually, she comes to the conclusion that Puckett and Joyce must’ve head to the nearby

station to call for help. She decides to set out and go after them and prepares the sledge for the journey.

Chapter Three - The Encounter

Luka Sims is working in his office, finishing his article on the grand epidemic that wiped out the whole human population. He finds himself alone in the entire City and publishes headlines asking if anybody is out there, “Editor Wonders, is anybody out there?” He continues writing his articles until he hears a faint tapping noise. At first he ignores it, convinced that he’s imagining things due to the isolation he is facing. However the tapping noise occurs again and he is convinced that it is the sound of footsteps. He feels blood rush through his veins as he goes outside his office building in search of another ‘survivor.’ He quickly scans the area around his office building and spots a figure by the corner. As Luka continues pursue the mysterious figure, he finally catches up and discovers a man and introduces himself to him as Luka Sims. The man responds by asking him if he is real and says he is blind. After they converse, the blind man doesn’t identify himself with a name, however he does respond by telling Luka there must be other survivors in the city as well. They go on a search for other survivors for several days as Luka continues to house the blind man in his apartment. Eventually they find another survivor named Minny Rings. They begin to stay together and ask each other how they crossed over to the other side. Minny responds by saying she got ‘The Blinks,’ which refers to the epidemic. The three continue to reside in Lukas apartment and agree once again, to search for survivors. They continuously go out to search for survivors and one day, hear a sound like a gunshot from the central park. They approach the park and discover a man firing a pistol, with approximately 200 people surrounding him.

Chapter Four - The Miles

Laura continues on her agonizing journey to the station on the sledge. Her GPS system is working fine, although she is beginning to tire easily. She settles down and sets up her tent for the night. As she is cooking her meals for the night, she remembers certain memories of her childhood and recalls the time she had to go to the dentist for her monthly check-up. She recalls having her mom’s car hit another automobile and seeing her mother fight the driver of the other car about the crash, complaining about how drivers who can’t drive shouldn’t be given licenses in the first place. She remembers having a scar from the crash and continues on her journey towards the station. As Laura continues on her journey towards the station, she feels her muscles ache and atrophy. She feels compelled to take a rest but tries her best to keep moving because she knows resting will cost her time. In the end she agonizingly continues on her journey towards the station without stopping. Only when the wind blows does she decide to set up her tent and take a rest. The nights began to grow longer and Laura begins to get anxious about her situation. She rests less and quickens her pace, she knows that reaching the station will make her feel much better, especially if other people are there. Laura ponders the idea of talking with people again. After a grueling journey across the expansive sheets of ice, she begins to see

remnants of Coke cans and different products on the floor. She realizes she must be close to the station and finally arrives.

Chapter Five - The Homecoming

Marion and Philip Byrd are a couple and the parents of Laura Byrd. Marion begins to think about how she has become so much more calm and lifeless after crossing over to the other side. After the massive reunion of surviving souls in the City, she and Philip have become part of a small society once again. They frequently go out to eat and have dates, however neither of them feel a spark between them anymore. The two go into Bristow's diner, a man who has always wanted to work as an owner of his own restaurant after crossing over. The food is delicious and the two enjoy their meal without conversing a lot. It is revealed Marion and Philip didn't attend to Laura as much as they would've wanted to and ended up seeing their daughter cut off many ties with her parents. Marion spends most of her life in the afterlife thinking about where her daughter is and why she can't find her in the City if she is actually dead. Eventually, Marion begins to hallucinate, seeing Laura's apparition. But suddenly she hears a lot of deceased souls mentioning Laura's name. Marion becomes extremely alert and intrigued that so many people know her daughter. She confirms their connections and if they are actually talking about the right Laura Byrd. Marion meets Laura's boss, the one who sent her to Antarctica and one of Laura's college roommates. None of them know where Laura is but Marion feels more reassured after hearing about her daughter from other people. She feels exhausted from all the walking, asking one person to the next about his/her connection with Laura.

Chapter Six - The Station

Laura arrives at the station and sees lumps in the ground near the station. She discovers that the lumps are actually graves. She wonders if the graves are of those of the station mainly because she finds the station completely deserted. However she thinks about who must've buried them and is convinced somebody must be around. She finds nobody in the station and decides to warm herself, not realizing how cold she actually is. She eats some decent food and looks around for information. She finds a newspaper dating back 4 months with the word 'Plague.' She finds out that a massive epidemic was on the verge of wiping out the entire human population. At this point she doesn't know if it actually did or not. As she continues to explore around the station, looking for signs of life or any clues to where the other members of the station might be, she finds a paper with a list of names on them. These names are the names of the people who work and live at the station. She finds that next to each name, there is a list of things to do. She also finds X's next to 13 of the 20 names on the list. Bewildered she becomes determined to find out what the X's actually mean and tries to dig in deeper. She looks around the file cabinets and drawers. After a fruitless effort, she rests for a bit by sitting on the couch, hoping that somebody will come in opening the front door of the station and seeing a survivor. However she's convinced that nobody is going to come into the station after a long silence endures. She continues searching for clues and answers and stumbles upon something very valuable. Excited,

she picks it up and opens it up, reading what the pages say. It is Robert Joyce's journal. Curious to see what it holds inside, she opens it up and starts reading.

Chapter Seven - The Patriarch

A man stands on the streets, raising signs that have excerpts from the bible. He reads them out in hopes of convincing people to convert to Christianity. One of these excerpts reads 'If I will that he Tarry till I come, what is that to thee?' A few people stop by and listen to what the man has to say. They ask him if he really believes in what his sign says and the religious man replies by saying he is positive Jesus Christ will return. The religious man goes around the City telling people of God's influence. Sometimes the man finds himself so absorbed into the teachings of Christianity that he forgets to feed himself. He goes up to a homosexual couple and gets beaten and jeered at by the couple. He finds his tooth hanging out his mouth when he wakes up from the beating. Later it is revealed the man's name is Coleman Kinzler. He returns to his apartment and the next day he eats lunch with a mail carrier named Joseph, a good friend of his. Joseph tells Coleman that he used to believe that God gave everyone three wishes. Coleman replies by saying he had God confused for a genie. Later he returns home and wakes up to the sound of noisy birds on his window sill. He shoos them away and goes to the park and the city to recite lines from the Bible again. He sees the homosexual couple that gave him a beating the other day. He rushes towards them and tells them that God loves them. The boys are very embarrassed and seem to run away. Coleman chases after them but as he turns a corner he bumps into a kiosk and falls down. A woman named Sarah helps him up by addressing him by his name. When Coleman asks how she knew his name she replies by saying it's on his name tag. He thanks the woman for her help and sincerity and the two sit down together as Coleman explains the ideas behind Job's teachings and stories in the Bible to her. The two then separate and go home. Coleman feels exhausted.

Chapter Eight - The Virus

After Laura finds Joyce's journal, she discovers that the epidemic had been spreading rapidly during that time. As she reads his journal entries, she can see that Joyce and other members of the station were extremely worried about the epidemic spreading to the members of their families. Laura continues reading his journal entries and notices that with each entry, several people die due to the epidemic in the station and that the epidemic spreads from one continent to another in a matter of days. Laura begins to ponder the possibility of survivors. After reading Joyce's second entry, she reads his third and notices an even smaller number of survivors. She notices Joyce and the station members stored as much as food as they could knowing it might be their last. She feels tempted to eat something out of the refrigerator but is cautious knowing that there is the possibility that the food might be contaminated and thus, transfer the epidemic to Laura. She keeps her distance from the food and reads the final journal entry. The entry reads that there are no more survivors and that it could be the end of the human race. Joyce writes that the humans have left an unimpressive legacy with its pollution and damage it has caused. Out of exhaustion, Joyce ends his final journal entry there by saying his

head aches. However it says nothing about the death of either Puckett nor Joyce. Laura feels hopeful that they might be at the Penguin Roost. In the end, the chapter ends with her pondering.

Chapter Nine - The Numbers

The soul of Michael Puckett is thinking about the number of people one person can remember. He begins to list some people he is personally close with, friends and family. However he goes beyond that and soon requires paper and pencil to write down the names of all the people he remembers. Soon after writing all the names, he counts the number of names and there happen to be 42,000 names. Astonished, he talks to Joyce, who is also deceased about this number. They both discuss the idea of being connected to other people through distinct memories. The two discuss the potential possibility of everybody being connected to Laura and the idea of whole web of connections that connects one person to the next. Laura would probably remember her peers, then these peers would remember their peers and so on. This would make up most of the remaining population that thrive in the City. The two suddenly realize that since the souls only remain existent when a person on the other side still remembers them, if Laura dies then the entire City would probably lose it's entire population and all of it's inhabitants. The two are bewildered at the idea while discussing it at a local coffee shop. With no time to lose, Michael Puckett seeks do things he has always wanted to do, especially when time is so limited. He lists the people he personally knew and decides to look for his deceased brother. He goes to the city library and enters the archives section. There he carves out an address out of the Census that's outdated by almost a decade. He goes to the address on the paper and knocks on the door. His brother, Nathaniel Puckett, doesn't respond but a man that claims to have been his brother's roommate in college responds and welcomes him in the house. He lets Michael ask a whole series of questions and Michael discovers many things about his brother, such as the fact that he was an orphan and he worked as a subway aficionado. Intrigued, Michael feels satisfied with the information he receives.

Chapter Ten - The Crevasse

As Laura is traveling to the Roost, she faces harsh snow storms and conditions. She continues to travel despite the ice cold temperatures and the inability to properly navigate through the snow and darkness. She occasionally checks her compass to make sure she is heading in the right direction and as she does, plots out her path. However she sees what she thinks to be a small hole in the ice ahead of her. Due to the inability to properly see in the dark, she falls into a crevasse and finds herself stuck and trapped. Her sledge is apparently on ground level and heavy enough to support her weight. Laura struggles to rearrange herself in the right position before she actually is able to hoist herself up back by pulling on the rope. She finally succeeds after many fruitless attempts and passes out of exhaustion. She wakes up and finds herself in the same location and simply continues on her travels towards the Roost. She begins to shiver and partially lose control of her mind as she begins to blurt out random sequences of words that have no meaning to them. Laura begins to become extremely exhausted and decides to set up camp to rest and continue her journey after some sleep. She sets up her tent and lies

down, thinking about distant memories from her past. She tries to remember the names of certain people. By the time she remembers all of the names, she is asleep.

Chapter Eleven - The Changes

The weather is terrible in the City as snow and ice cover the streets inch by inch. Lindell, an important member of the White Powder Campaign and quite successful man, exits his house to find a beggar waiting. The beggar tries to be friendly and engage in some conversation. However, Lindell buys none of it and simply ignores him as he passes by and heads to work. The beggar reacts ferociously and taunts him with his sarcasm, saying that Lindell must be too good for anyone because he wears fancy clothing and shiny black shoes. As the soul of Lindell heads towards his work area, he remembers how his campaign aided in the spread of the massive epidemic. He refused to blame himself for any of the problems caused by the epidemic. It is revealed that the White Powder Campaign Lindell was part of, was associated with Coca-Cola and created a partnership. The White Powder campaign was actually a company that specialized in the production of syrup by harvesting the Venezuela Plant. However, Lindell guesses that men with great purpose, Muslim extremists or Islamic terrorists might've inserted the virus directly into the syrup. It is also revealed that the epidemic was inserted into coca-cola bottles and cans everywhere, contaminating anyone who drank the beverage. The epidemic spread extremely quickly and caused a lot of trouble for people worldwide. Lindell is returning home and finds a coke can in his hand. He fears that if he simply throws it away, somebody might convict him of being responsible for the spread of the epidemic. As paranoid as it sounds, Lindell decides not to throw it away in any old trash bin but somewhere more secretive. He runs towards the river where he throws the can away there. He feels a certain feeling of satisfaction as if he had been freed of all of his guilt. He returns home and finds the beggar there again. He is taunted again by the beggar's sarcasm but Lindell ignores him again and returns home.

Chapter Twelve - The Birds

Laura checks her luggage and realizes she is missing her tent. She begins very anxious until she realizes she is at the penguin roost. She feels a sense of relief as she sees thousands of penguins interacting as well as a tiny shack nearby. She quickly rushes over and warms herself up. She looks around for survivors, particularly Puckett and Joyce. She loses all hope of finding them or anybody for that matter and accepts the fact that there is nobody left. She makes herself comfortable in the shack and remembers a distant memory with one of her friends from the past, Minny Rings. She remembers playing with her when she was a little girl and daring each other to do silly things. Laura suffers from the cold and finds her fingers extremely difficult to move. Most of her body is very numb and some parts even look deformed to a certain extent. She falls asleep eventually and wakes up. She remembers dreaming so she assumes she must've slept sporadically. She wakes up in a much better state and actually feels some warmth in her body. Her blood is flowing through her body as she can actually feel it rush through her veins and arteries, almost as if they were providing her with life again. In the end she can also feel her heartbeat as her heart pumps the blood to the various parts of her body. She feels as if she has

found a new meaning in life and doesn't lose hope. She finds herself quite comfortable and finally settles down.

Chapter Thirteen - The Heartbeat

Minny Rings fails to get a good night sleep. She observes her surroundings and the items that are in Lukas apartment. She is simply looking around until she hears a sound that sounds like a heart beat. She hears the repetitive thumps and dismisses them without thinking twice. But the heartbeats keep coming back and she is quite astonished by these sounds. Luka and Minny talk about the heartbeats, Luka says that he has mentioned them in his article before and that he has heard them too. Luka says that a woman once told him there is a huge heart under the subway system that everyone can feel. Minny then begins to remember the times with Laura when they were children and growing adults. They had always been the best of friends even when Laura had fallen in love with her professor Luka Sims. Minny recalls the complications that were present during that time and is frankly disturbed once she recalls some of the details. The two continue to live in the City and their lives as they begin to form a close relationship. They share the same house as well as the same bed. The two go out to lunch at a Korean restaurant, eating Kim-chi and rice. They enjoy their time outside. One early morning, Luka tells Minny to wake up and the two simply laugh at each other. Minny's hair resembles that of a caveman and Luka makes no hesitation in pointing this out. After hearing this, Minny laughs and smiles with joy as Luka also enjoys the beautiful moment. Minny adds the detail that nobody in the past had been able to make her smile or laugh like that, mainly because nobody had taken the time to know her personally.

Chapter Fourteen - The Marbles

Spring arrives and Laura loves it. Laura discovers that she is on the verge of making a new discovery after she finds a flock of marbles traveling altogether. Out of curiosity, Laura follows the flock and finds herself in a very new, vibrant location. She enjoys the bright sunlight as the hot rays begin to melt the large expanses of ice. Much of the light reflects off the other blocks of ice causing lots of beautiful shimmering reflections. Various colors result as the different rays of light hit the ice at different angles. Laura finds herself guessing which colors will form off the ice and enjoys her little game. She gazes upon the beautiful spectacle as the weather becomes to get even hotter. She is forced to jump from one block of ice to another. She uses each block almost like a sailboat, maneuvering her way in the water and jumping on another block of ice if the one she is currently on melts or somehow is not fit for travel. She notices a lot more animals are present. She sees fish dancing in the water as well as various birds flying over head. She feels a sense of pleasure that she has never felt before. Laura is actually happy and after suffering several months of isolation in the deadly cold, she finds herself in a place that she says resembles heaven. She continues to enjoy the spring in the polar ice cap of Antarctica and says she feels as if she could walk forever.

Chapter Fifteen - The Crossing

It is revealed that Laura is the only remaining human being on earth. Laura is the only reason why the souls in the City are currently there. The City begins to shrink in size. Laura finds herself in Antarctica enjoying the warm climate as it lasts. A quick history of the blind man is mentioned. His life on Earth had been an unpleasant one, and he had noticed that he was happier at this time and place in the City. The souls in the City continue to live their lives. Many of their lives are now much more happier and full of purposes to live for, such as the love between Minny and Luka. The souls of the City are now part of a new society that defines the human history that we have made throughout all these years. People start to notice their significant presence within the City and start to respect one another. The blind man briefly mentions that the shrinking size of the City will be unstoppable and people will need to listen to each other in a long period of time. However, anything that would happen in the future would be highly unpredictable. The memories that we have each other are the reasons why we exist and continue to live on even after death.

7. Chapter Study Questions

Chapter 1

1.How did the blind man end up in the city and how did he crossover?

Answer: The blind man tells a story that he was walking in the dessert and suddenly ended up in the city. People end up in the city if they die and stay in someone else's memory in the real world. The blind man crossed over when he died in a car crash.

2.Why is the population of the city decreasing?

Answer: The population of the city is decreasing because a serious virus. This virus is spreading very rapidly through air worldwide. Since the virus clears out the people who had the memories of people in the city, they disappear as well.

3.How do people of the City find out what's happening in the real world?

Answer: New people appear in the city as soon as they die. In other words, the new people are the most recent. Through these new people, Luka writes an article through an interview of the new people and find out what happens in the real world currently.

Chapter 2

1.Who is Laura Byrd and what association does she work for?

Answer: Laura Byrd is a female employee at Coca Cola and she is sent to work in a laboratory in Antarctica. Coca cola sent her to research for the company's improvement. She is sent with two more employees, Joyce and Puckett.

2.Where is Laura currently and why was she sent there?

Answer: Laura is currently in Antarctica since she was sent on a mission to find better solutions for the Coca cola company, especially the ice. The independent woman that she is, Laura works hard to reach the station she was sent to and tries to fulfill her mission.

3.What happens to Joyce and Puckett during their trip?

Answer: Since the station was abandoned, Joyce and Puckett decide that it is not safe to stay there without proper food and equipments. This makes them run out to the Antarctic saying that they will go get some help. However, these two do not return.

Chapter 3

1.What does Luka work as in the City? How does he get the right information he needs?

Answer: Luka works as a newspaper man for the Sims City Times. All his reports come from various interviews, and he enjoys interviewing the new people in town to get the information that is currently happening in the planet Earth.

2.What changes does Luka notice within the City?

Answer: Suddenly, the amount of people are disappearing within the city. The city used to be filled with people each block, but as time progresses Luka notices that more and more people are disappearing. This is a matter that hadn't happened in his time in the city which makes him question this situation.

3.How does Luka encounter the blind man?

Answer: Since many people disappear over a time span, one day Luka notices that there is no one else but him in a restaurant. He walks around to see if anyone was around and notices a blind man in front of a church. In relief, Luka goes up to the blind man and greets him.

Chapter 4

1. What does Laura do in order to ensure the Coca Cola company that she was alive?

Answer: Just in case the company suspects of her disappearance, Laura decides to go on the GPS system. However, she finds out that the station she was put in did not have proper GPS. Her survival was not of importance to the company.

2. Does Laura find anything strange about the station she is put in?

Answer: The station was strangely warm and there were plenty of food canned for the person who owned the building. However, it was strange how the person who owned the station did not appear any time. This made her decide to use the station for her habitat use.

3. What is the daily pattern Laura goes through each day at the station?

Answer: Laura wakes up each morning, not knowing which day it is since she has no calendar. She puts the canned food in the microwave and eat meals whenever she is hungry since there is no clock. She then researches the station and goes to sleep late at night.

Chapter 5

1. What is different about Myrion Byrd and how does she relate to the previous chapters?

Answer: Marion Byrd is the mother of Laura Byrd which is a character that is alive in the planet Earth. The other characters have no relation to Laura, so Marion is the first to strike the audience.

2. How does Bill Bristow change within the chapter and what can you tell by his actions?

Answer: Bill first believes in nothing and does not care why he ended up in the city. However, as the chapter progresses, he believes in the blind man's theory that all of them were placed in the after life in order to realize that they are still loved by people in the planet Earth.

3. What do the characters in the city all have in common so far?

Answer: All of the people in the city are depressed from a certain reason, whether it is from loneliness or the fact that they are dead. None of them talk about the positive things during their lifetime, but they tend to focus on the negative things.

Chapter 6

1. What strange things does Laura find outside her expedition?

Answer: Laura takes a walk outside the station one day and comes around a few graves. These graves were of people who worked in the laboratory, which she found strange. She wondered who buried these people.

2. What is the list that Laura finds inside the station.

Answer: The list of things that Laura finds is a check list of a disease that she's never heard of. This supposed disease is caused by a virus and it is spread very rapidly through air. Her mission then shifts to finding out more about this station.

3. How does Laura change her mind during the chapter based on her findings?

Answer: Laura's first motivation in the beginning of the chapter was to find a way out of the station and resume her job. However, after Laura goes to the station and finds graves outside the yard, she shifts her focus to finding out what happened in the station.

Chapter 7

1. Why does Brockmeier keep on changing the focus of characters in each chapter.

Answer: Brockmeier purposely shifts the chapter to different chapters each time because he plans to combine the life and after life in separate sections. He tries to bring relationships in further chapters to make the characters all relate to one another.

2. How does religion play in this chapter? Are the characters strong believers?

Answer: God is mentioned many times in the chapter and the characters do not believe in him since they are placed in the city. Some never had belief and some believe there is a possibility of God. They also believe that this might be a test from god.

3. Why does Brockmeier repeatedly use verses from the bible to speak his mood?

Answer: The bible verses are mentioned as the characters take small actions such as talking about their lives. Brockmeier incorporates the quote's meanings into the characters' situations.

Chapter 8

1. What pattern do you notice from the titles of the chapters?

Answer: Each chapter starts with a title that summarizes the important part of the chapter. The crevasse is emphasized in one of the chapters, so the title for that chapter was 'The Crevasse'.

2. How far did Puckett and Joyce get outside of the Antarctic?

Answer: Joyce and Puckett made it into the second station of Antarctica. However, there are no signs that they got further. They walked hundreds of miles to reach the next station.

3. What difference do you notice from Puckett, Joyce, and Laura?

Answer: Joyce and Puckett left the station because they thought that no one would find them in the station and wouldn't come for help. However, Laura believed that staying in a safer environment would be more beneficial in this situation.

Chapter 9

1. How does Brockmeier talk about the numbers of people within the chapter?

Answer: Brockmeier makes the characters count the amount of people that had touched the characters lives. Everything shifts to statistics in this chapter and strangely, the characters reveal different numbers.

2. What project does Luka start on with the other characters?

Answer: Luka tries to find as many people in the town as possible since he seems to be finding only a few people around. His goal now is to find new people who could inform him about what is happening in the real world and he tries to interview them as much as possible.

3. Who is Joyce and how does she come out in the chapter?

Answer: Joyce turns out to be the same Joyce that was with Laura for the trip in Antarctica and she is in the city based on Laura's memories. People start to figure out that they all have relations with Laura Byrd. The mystery seems to solve quicker.

Chapter 10

1.How did Laura end up inside the cracks of the snow mountain?

Answer: Since the last time Laura left the station she found graves, this time she decided to explore further. However, as she walks around the ice caves, she falls into a crevasse and hurts herself.

2.What happens to Laura when it gets too cold inside?

Answer: Laura repeatedly falls asleep whenever it gets too cold inside the crevasse and wakes up to cough from the cold. When she cannot feel her legs, she moves further into the crevasse to block the wind from coming in.

3.What are the sudden thoughts that Laura has during her time in the crevasse.

Answer: The only thought that Laura has is to sleep, but she fears that if she sleeps right away, that she would never be able to wake up again. Laura thinks that the crevasse was her destiny and tries to sleep repeatedly, only finding herself waking up the next morning.

Chapter 11

1.How does the weather change through out the chapter and what does it symbolize?

Answer: Snow appears in the chapter and Brockmeier talks about the relationship between the snow and the characters. The snow represents death since everyone in the city died according to the relationship of snow.

2.What do you notice about the ways the characters died?

Answer: The characters died from crashes or by the slipping of snow. Many other characters died from the virus spreading to the cold weather while it was snowing outside.

3.How does the CEO relate to Laura in the planet Earth?

Answer: The CEO is also revealed in the chapter to have sent Laura to the station in Antarctic and talks about how it was a good choice. The CEO believes that it was the right choice to send Laura because he thinks that it prevented her from getting the virus that the rest of them got.

Chapter 12

1.What's wrong with the supplies that Laura has in the station?

Answer: The supplies start to run out as she eats away the materials and she now has the instinct to go away and find more food. Since there aren't any more stations around, Laura decides to explore what is around her.

2.What do the birds and the penguins symbolize in the chapter?

Answer: The birds give her a signal to escape the dangerous parts of the Antarctic and she thinks that they are a message from god. The penguins symbolize second chance in this chapter since they give Laura a second chance for survival.

3. Where was the fortress located and how did Laura know where she was?

Answer: It turns out that the fortress was located just a few miles off from the station she was in previously. She noticed her location through a proper GPS system and was surprised by how far she had walked.

Chapter 13

1.How do the characters in the City relate to Laura Byrd in the real life?

Answer: There is everyone that was touched by Laura Byrd during her lifetime. There are her business partners, her friends, her family, and also the people who went to church with her.

2. What role does the Bible play in the chapter?

Answer: The bible plays the role of proper teaching just like the birds giving the right signals to Laura during her crisis in the crevasse. The bible gives the people in the city strength to stay positive.

3. What ideas do the characters share about the past?

Answer: The characters talk about their past life in a negative tone and how they were fooled around and how many times they became bankrupt. The only negative things in their lives were mentioned, and not one mentioned about anything that made them happy.

Chapter 14

1. What is the significance of the change in weather from cold to warm?

Answer: The weather plays a role in telling the audience the mood of the people of the city. When there was a snowstorm, everyone seemed to be depressed, and when the snowstorm ended and sunshine came, people were in positive moods.

2. What role does the marble play within the chapter?

Answer: The marble plays the role that the penguins played in the previous chapter. Just like the penguins, the marble rolled on the floor in the direction of the next safe station and Laura moved there quickly.

3. Why does the sun seem larger to Laura in the end of the chapter?

Answer: Brockmeier portrays the sun as extremely large because he tries to tell the audience that Laura faces death. As she looks up into the sky, the sun seems to be flashing towards her brighter than ever.

Chapter 15

1. Why did the birds return to the city and how does the blind man interpret this situation?

Answer: The birds had been helping Laura Byrd go to safe stations whenever she needed guidance. However, this was before Laura had died and now that the birds came into the city, Brockmeier tells us that the birds had come to make the people of the city feel better than their mood currently.

2. What can you interpret about the after life based on this chapter?

Answer: The city became smaller suddenly and the blind man says that it would continue to shrink as the population of the people decreased. The chapter tells us that the people in the town will all come together and one day they would all disappear and go to the next life.

3. What does the blind man remember the most about his life and why do you think Brockmeier decided to emphasize that particular memory?

Answer: Before the blind man died, he had been teased by many people by his blindness and kindness was never touched in his life. This memory of teasing stayed with him, but the blind man knew that there would always be something good to come. In the after life, the blind man has the same attitude in the crisis situation he is in of losing people, and he continues to think positively.